

It was looking unlikely that our aircraft would be fixed in time to get us to Antarctica on schedule. It was a holiday weekend, and the prospects of a drop pitch trim actuator arriving in New Zealand in time for the Tuesday departure wasn't encouraging.

And even if it did show up, there was no guarantee the aging C-141 Starlifter would still crank up and go. After all, C-141s have been around for a while — one is in the history books as the first jet to land in Antarctica when it touched down at McMurdo Station on Nov. 14, 1966. This would be its last year supporting the Operation Deep Freeze mission of transporting scientists and supplies from New Zealand to Antarctica because it's being phased out of the Air Force inventory.

But a C-5 was diverted and delivered the elusive part that makes the horizontal tail fin go up and down. Kind of an important thing, so I was glad and interested in observing it being installed.

Two maintainers were at work closely inspecting

the part still in its wooden crate. The gray hair and wrinkles of the two reservists indicated to me that they had probably seen a few trim activators in their day. I remember the distinct feeling that I was glad these two guys were responsible for a job that could ultimately cause a crash if it wasn't done perfectly.

The more I'm around the Guard and Reserve, the more I appreciate what they bring to the fight — experience — and lots of it. Not that I don't have complete faith in young active duty maintainers only a few years into their career, but there's something to be said


about guys who've been in the same unit, working on the same aircraft for a decade or so. There's a lot of corporate knowledge going on there, something that can't be accelerated any faster than the maturing of a fine bottle of red wine.

I grew up hearing jokes about weekend warriors, and heard them still after I enlisted in 1986. The first reservist I remember meeting was a civil affairs officer in the desert at the first

Gulf War. At that point, he had been away from his "weekend" job for more than 180 days but was soon to be heading home — to finalize his divorce. That was an eye-opener for me as to the duration that Guard and Reserve members were used, and to the personal sacrifice that call to duty sometimes entails.

Since then, I've met scores of other "part-timers" often doing what seemed like full-time work. Aircrews shuttling C-130s from Germany to the Balkans after the Bosnian conflict always seemed to be Guard or Reserve. How most manage to juggle their Air Force job with a career or family back home is impressive.

But it's the real-world experience they bring to the Guard and Reserve that makes them valuable for mission success. When maintainers deploy from their units back home, they often bring with them decades of experience in their other life as a banker, policeman or electrician. They've had a career while raising a family and establishing roots within their community. That may not make them a better maintainer, but I think the life

experiences they bring to the fight makes us a better, well-rounded force. A different mindset will probably always exist between active duty Airmen and their Guard and Reserve counterparts. Viva la difference. 

— Master Sgt.
Chuck Roberts

Team Air Force

by Master Sgt. Efrain Gonzalez



Reserve Master Sergeants Rob Jendrock and Steve Randle

of the 452nd Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, March Air Reserve Base, Calif. replace the pitch trim actuator on a C-141 Starlifter, headed to Antarctica on a resupply mission.